

**MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
NR-ELIGIBILITY REVIEW FORM**

NR Eligible: yes ☐ no ☒

M: 35-142

~~M: 37-16~~ THIS RESOURCE IS ERRONEOUSLY
MAPPED/LABELED ON MHT SURVEY MAPS AS
PART OF THE B & O METRO BRANCH

Property Name: Georgetown Branch, B & O Railroad Inventory Number: Georgetown (D.C.), Bethesda,
Former CSX/B & O Railroad Line from
Address: Georgetown to Silver Spring City: Chevy Chase Silver Spring, MD Zip Code: Multiple
County: Montgomery County, MD, Washington West, DC-MD-VA
Washington DC USGS Topographic Map: Kensington, MD

Owner: Multiple

Tax Parcel Number: Multiple Tax Map Number: _____ Tax Account ID Number: _____

Project: Georgetown Branch Transitway/Trail Agency: Maryland Transit Administration

Site visit by MHT Staff: ☐ no ☐ yes Name: _____ Date: _____

Eligibility recommended ☐ Eligibility **not** recommended ☒

Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D Considerations: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G ☐ None

Is the property located within a historic district? ☒ no ☐ yes Name of district: _____

Is district listed? ☐ no ☐ yes Determined eligible? ☐ no ☐ yes District Inventory Number: _____

Documentation on the property/district is presented in: "Assessment of NR Eligibility of The Georgetown Branch of the B & O Railroad and Structures along the route between Bethesda and Silver Spring" 2002

Description of Property and Eligibility Determination: (Use continuation sheet if necessary and attach map and photo)

The Georgetown Branch of the B & O was a short freight line, which ran between the former Metropolitan Branch of the B & O Railroad in Montgomery County, Maryland (now the CSX) near Silver Spring and Georgetown in the District of Columbia.

In the 1880s, the B & O developed a plan for a rail line to provide access to the markets south of Washington. The line would diverge from the Metropolitan Branch west of Silver Spring, pass through Chevy Chase and Bethesda, cross the Potomac River at Chain Bridge, skirt D.C.'s western border, and terminate at Quantico, Virginia. This branch was to include a spur to Georgetown, which at the time was an attractive freight market, manufacturing and distribution center. The B & O began construction on this line in 1892, completing only two miles in the first year, the segment between Silver Spring and Chevy Chase. Soon after, the B & O went into receivership and for the next 17 years struggled financially. In 1909, the B & O completed the segment of the branch between Chevy Chase and Georgetown.

After 1910, the Georgetown Branch began to show a profit. The line provided fuel for the Capital Traction Company's streetcar plant in Georgetown and coal and building materials for Georgetown, as well as coal and building materials for the Maryland towns along its route. In 1914, the branch line was extended from its terminus at the West Bank of Rock Creek in Georgetown eastward across the creek to the site of the Lincoln Memorial. The line then carried limestone and other building materials for the construction of the memorial. The B & O lost one of its most important contracts, that with the Capital Traction Company, in 1933. The Connecticut Avenue Streetcar line in Chevy Chase was abandoned in 1935, eliminating a second coal customer served by the branch line. The branch line continued, however, to operate through WWII. In the 1960s,

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Eligibility recommended ☐ Eligibility not recommended ☒
Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D Considerations: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G ☐ None

Comments:

Compromised integrity.

Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services

[Signature]
Reviewer, NR program

04/11/02
Date

4/11/02
Date

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Continuation Sheet No. 1

M: 35-142

the gentrification of Georgetown and consequent removal of most of the waterfront industry removed much of the need for freight rail service along the Georgetown Branch line (between the Metropolitan Branch line and Georgetown). In 1981, the B & O was absorbed into the CSX Corporation. The last train to Georgetown ran in 1985, as trucks replaced rail service for hauling coal to power the GSA heating plant. Since the CSX discontinued operations, MTA has been evaluating the use of the former rail line for shared transit/trail use and the Capital Crescent Trail Coalition has been pursuing extending their trail system north to Silver Spring.

Although the first two miles of the line were constructed in the late 19th century, the Georgetown Branch of the B & O Railroad is primarily a 20th century freight line that ran between the B & O's Metropolitan Branch at Silver Spring, Maryland and Georgetown in D.C. According to a short history of the branch on the cctrail.org website, the line "served basically as a minor freight spur carrying coal and building materials to local outlets in Chevy Chase, Bethesda and Georgetown." Herbert Harwood, Jr., in his history of the B & O Railroad, *Impossible Challenge*, also wrote that "in the end the Georgetown Branch was yet another symbol of B & O's unfilled hopes, materializing as nothing more than a relatively minor local freight spur." The line may possess a minimal level of local significance in the context of Chevy Chase and Bethesda, for which the line supplied many building materials to facilitate the growth of the towns.

Since rail service was discontinued on the Georgetown Branch line in 1985, both modern development and deterioration have damaged the historic integrity of the resource. The ties, ballast and tracks have been removed or totally obscured on the portion of the line that has been converted to the Capital Crescent Trail and on most other portions of the line. A major structure on the route, the Rock Creek Trestle, has been a victim of arson and neglect. Only small sections of the original trackwork remain. The section of the line that has been converted to the Capitol Crescent Trail no longer retains integrity as a railroad line since all of its track, ties and ballast have been removed or obliterated. The line has also been paved throughout most of its length and many of its historic bridges have been renovated to accommodate modern trail usage. Some structures along this portion of the line may retain engineering significance and should be evaluated as individually eligible for the NRHP (e.g., Arizona Avenue Trestle and the Dalecarlia Tunnel). On the portion of the line that is in the early study phases for a combination transitway/trail (MTA's Georgetown Branch Transitway/Trail and the Capital Crescent Trail Coalition's trail extension), few sections of the line retain any trackwork. The only extant sections are in Chevy Chase at the track crossing of Connecticut Avenue and at Jones Mill Road, and across the Rock Creek Trestle.

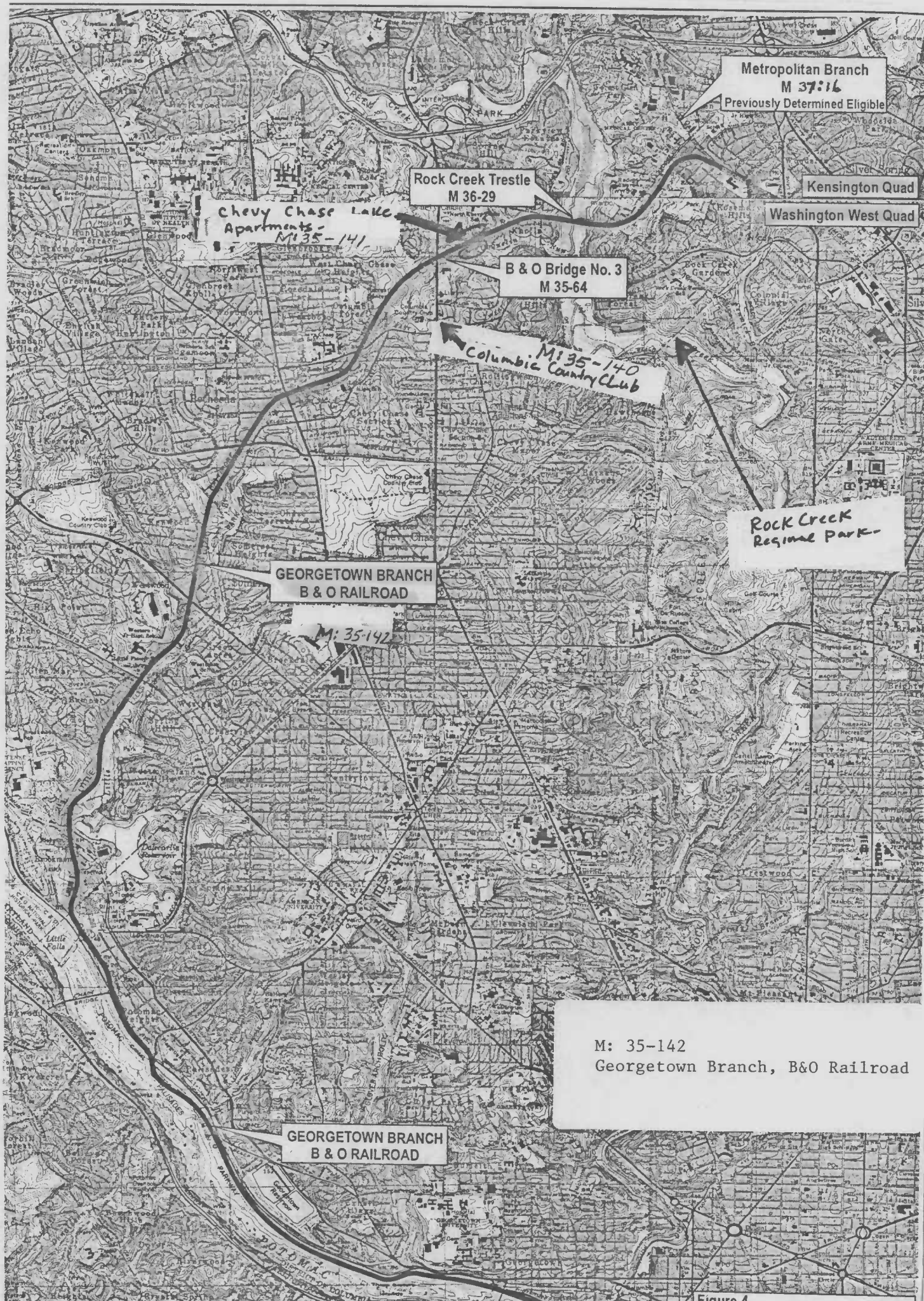
The line no longer possesses sufficient integrity to represent its significance as a railroad freight line that facilitated the development of towns along its route. As stated above, the ties, rails, ballast, etc. along almost the entire route are gone or obscured. In the southernmost portion where the Capital Crescent Trail has been completed (Bethesda to Georgetown), the railroad bed has been paved over or modified for trail usage, and with the exception of some of the structures along the route, no historic fabric remains to represent the historic use of the trail as a railroad freight line.

In the northernmost portion (from Bethesda to Silver Spring), only three short sections of track remain, at the Connecticut Avenue crossing (about 50 feet), at Jones Mill Road (about five feet) and across part of the Rock Creek trestle. Fencing, vegetative growth and urban development have encroached upon the old railroad right of way. In areas, the old railroad bed has substantially narrowed down and is covered by a canopy of trees. Several railroad structures along the route have also been altered so that they no longer reflect their historic era. For example, the bridge just east of Connecticut Avenue has been renovated and looks modern and the Rock Creek Trestle is about one-half modern (1972) and the other half (1928) is severely damaged.

For these reasons, it is the opinion of the preparer of this form that the full route of the Georgetown Branch of the B & O Railroad is not eligible for the NRHP, nor is the portion of the line between Bethesda and Silver Spring. The evaluation undertaken for the Georgetown Transitway/Trail project focused only on the northern segment of the route. It did not closely analyze the section of the line in D.C. that had been considered eligible in the 1980s for planning purposes or the various structures along this portion of the route, such as the Dalecarlia Tunnel or the Whipple trusses at the Arizona Avenue crossing.

Prepared by: Margaret Slater, Parsons
Brinckerhoff for MTA

Date Prepared: February 5, 2002



Metropolitan Branch
M 37:16
Previously Determined Eligible

Rock Creek Trestle
M 36-29

Kensington Quad

Washington West Quad

Chevy Chase Lake
Apartments -
M 35-141

B & O Bridge No. 3
M 35-64

Columbia M: 35-140
Country Club

Rock Creek
Reginald Park

GEORGETOWN BRANCH
B & O RAILROAD

M: 35-142

M: 35-142
Georgetown Branch, B&O Railroad

GEORGETOWN BRANCH
B & O RAILROAD

Figure 4